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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that community colleges receive undeserved criticism as institutions that contribute to students' decline in college motivation. Rather, many college-bound youths underestimate college demands due to open-admissions policies and the ready availability of remedial courses, and fail to prepare adequately for this educational transition. High school students who believe they can make plans for college even if their academic achievement is low seem to reduce their efforts in high school. A 1992 national survey found that, while students with low grades can attend college, over 80% of college-planning students with low high school grades fail to complete any college degree 10 years later. Analyses indicate that high school grades strongly predict educational attainment, signifying whether students attain their plans, predicting plans-attainment for blacks and whites alike, and explaining much of the lower attainment and unrealized plans of disadvantaged students. High school grades have proven to be the most influential factor affecting students' failure to attain their original educational plans in open-door colleges. This paper asserts that the best way for community colleges to intervene would be to inform students about what they must do in high school to make their preparation match their educational plans. The development of linkage programs between high schools and colleges also may help improve high school students' understandings of college requirements. Contains 45 references. (AS)

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Community College Research Center

Occasional Paper

Unrealistic Plans And Misdirected Efforts: Are Community Colleges Getting The Right Message To High School Students

James Rosenbaum

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Unrealistic Plans And Misdirected Efforts: Are Community Colleges Getting The Right Message To High School Students?

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Occasional Paper

Community College Research Center

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
DATA AND METHODS	7
FINDINGS	8
CONCLUSION	25
POLICY IMPLICATIONS	30
NOTES	35
REFERENCES	37
APPENDIX	41

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ABSTRACT

While community colleges are criticized for "cooling out" students' plans, we find that the problem arises much earlier, in high school students' misunderstandings and failure to prepare for college demands. This paper finds that many college-bound youth hold "no-penalty" beliefs that they can attain their plans even if they do poorly in high school, and these beliefs seem to reduce their efforts in high school. Analyses of the 1992 follow-up of the HSB national survey find that, while students with low grades can attend college, over 80 percent of college-planning students with low high school grades fail to complete any college degree ten years later. Multivariate analyses indicate that high school grades strongly predict educational attainment, predict whether students attain their plans, predict plans-attainment for blacks as well as for whites, and explain much of the lower attainment and disappointed plans of disadvantaged students. Moreover, high school grades are the sole factor affecting students' failure to attain their original educational plans in open-door colleges. The best way for community colleges to reduce "cooling out" would be to inform students what they must do in high school to make their preparation match their educational plans. Allowing students to hold "high expectations" and no-penalty beliefs prevents them from realizing what actions are necessary to make their plans come true, and sets them on a course for later disappointment. Policy reforms are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have grown enormously over the past four decades. While four-year college enrollment roughly doubled between 1960 and 1990, community-college enrollment increased five-fold in the same period, from 200,000 to over 1,000,000 (NCES, 1992, Table 169). In turn, college opportunities have dramatically increased. While 45 percent of high school graduates entered some postsecondary institution in 1960, over 62 percent did in 1993. Moreover, community colleges initiated open-admissions policies and remedial courses to reduce the academic barriers to college, and the Associate of Arts (AA) degree has come to have increased value in the labor market, so that students do not need a BA to get an economic benefit from attending community college (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Grubb, 1992, 1993). Community colleges have increased access to an economically valued degree.

Despite these great gains, community colleges have been severely criticized. Clark (1960) showed that the ambiguous mission of community colleges seemed to offer access to four-year colleges when in fact these institutions "cooled out" aspirations as students gradually realized that college was not appropriate for their abilities. Studies since Clark's have continued to find substantial college attrition (Grubb, 1989), and they have focussed on the factors that redirect students' plans (Karabel, 1986). These criticisms have blamed community colleges for being less than candid about their cooling-out process, and they have suggested that the process is deceptive and unfair to college students.

Clark took the term "cooling out" from Goffman's (1952) analysis of confidence swindles. The key to a swindle is to give "marks" confidence that they will gain a valuable reward at very little cost, and then lure them to an "easy success" strategy. That is why a "mark" willingly hands over something of value

to a swindler or "snake oil" salesman. Marks only realize that their expectations were mistaken at a later time, after the person who encouraged the expectation is no longer present. The swindle occurred much earlier. Cooling out is merely the process for cleaning up afterwards in a way that reconciles the victim to the situation and causes less trouble.

This paper suggests that much of the criticism of community colleges is misplaced. Students' college failures arise not from barriers inside colleges, but from "systemic failure," a failure of colleges (and especially community colleges) to convey clear information about the preparation that high school students must get to have a strong chance of finishing a degree. Community colleges do not convey clear requirements, and high school counselors convey vague expectations to many youth, who consequently form inappropriate plans and fail to take appropriate actions to prepare for community colleges' requirements. These failures cannot be blamed solely on community colleges, high school counselors, or students; they arise from a systemic failure to communicate effective information across these three groups.

As a result, this systemic failure resembles Goffman's confidence schemes; students seem to be promised college for very little effort. This is not a conscious swindle. Rather, it comes inadvertently from the poor linkages between community colleges and high schools. It nonetheless creates disappointments that resemble a swindle. The systemic failure results in students forming plans that are inconsistent with their achievements and are destined to be disappointed. Lured by the prospect of easy success, students forfeit the opportunity to benefit from high school and they settle for easy curricula and undemanding classes. They know that open-door policies will allow them admission, but they are not aware of their poor chances of getting degrees. Rather than their college failure arising from overt barriers or mean-spirited cooling-out in community colleges, the seeds of failure in community colleges are planted much earlier-when high school

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students seem to be promised easy access to college for little effort.

Americans are strong advocates of open opportunity, which in recent decades has led to the "college-for-all" (CFA) norm. This norm states that all students can and should attend college, but it fails to tell students what they must do to attain this goal (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). The CFA norm is a variant of "the contest mobility norm," which says that opportunity for upward mobility should always stay open (Turner, 1960; Rosenbaum, 1975, 1976, 1986).

Americans are rightly proud of the CFA norm. The CFA norm encouraged the formation of community colleges, open admissions, and remedial classes. It discourages schools from tracking students prematurely, and it encourages high expectations in youth. It argues for better instruction in schools, especially schools serving low-income youth. Without this norm, society might give up on raising the educational achievement of the most disadvantaged youth.

While it is not meant to be deceptive, the CFA norm can inadvertently encourage a deception that hurts many youth, including the disadvantaged youth it is meant to help. The CFA norm encourages all students to plan on college, regardless of their past achievement. To avoid discouraging students, the CFA norm avoids focussing on requirements, but, in the process, some students fail to notice what steps they should take, and they are not warned when their low achievements make their college plans unlikely to be attained. While such encouragement helps younger children, it may mislead students in their later years of high school.

Thus, while 71 percent of high school seniors in the class of 1982 planned to get college degrees, half of seniors lack basic ninth-grade math and verbal skills (Murnane & Levy, 1997), and only about half of college entrants complete a college degree (Resnick & Wirt, 1996). The completion rate from two-year colleges is even worse. For the 1980 graduates enrolled full-time in two-year public colleges in October 1980, less than 40 percent complete any degree (AA or

higher) by 1986, and the rates are only 15 percent for the substantial numbers (about one-fourth) who are enrolled part-time (NCES, 1992, table 287). Students rarely attain their college plans. For the 1980 graduates who planned less than four years of college (but more than a certificate), less than twenty percent attained a college degree (AA or higher) in the next six years (NCES, 1992, table 286).

This has not always been true. The dropout rate from public two-year colleges increased sharply after 1972 (from 36 percent in 1972 to nearly 50 percent in 198) (Grubb, 1989, Table 2). One reason for these disappointing outcomes is that school officials do not warn students about potential problems. Rather than acting as gatekeepers as they did in earlier decades (Rosenbaum, 1976), guidance counselors now urge all students to attend college, but they rarely warn poorly prepared students that they will have difficulty completing a degree (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). Rather than hurting students by posing obstacles to their plans, counselors now may be hurting students by not informing them of potential obstacles they will face later on.

Contrary to Karabel's (1986) interpretation of community colleges as institutions that mislead students, Goffman's model suggests that deception is earlier, more subtle, and often in a different location. Indeed, "marks" go along with a swindle because their hopes are initially "heated up" to unrealistic expectations, and "cooling out" is only done late in the process. Thus, rather than focus on the "cooling out" process, one needs to examine why youth have unrealistically high expectations, which is the precipitating condition for why "cooling out" is required.

Indeed, if community colleges are to be blamed, it is not for "cooling out" their own students, but rather for allowing high school students to fail to realize what they must do in high school to attain their high expectations. If high school students are informed that they are poorly prepared for college, they can either

increase their efforts to prepare themselves, or they can revise their plans to be more realistic. In either case, "cooling out" is unneeded, and youths' plans are less likely to fail.

Community colleges do not intentionally deceive students. Rather they have well-intentioned practices of raising students' expectations, but these practices may have unintended consequences. Community colleges encourage all students to aim high and attend college, even poorly achieving students. Community colleges do not want to discourage these students. Yet for these students, subsequent failure is highly predictable, even before they enter community colleges, and students' failure to anticipate their probable failure prevents them from taking actions to prepare themselves for their goals.

Such a mechanism is more subtle than the one Karabel describes. Poor information allows many students to use their high school experiences poorly, and thus to seem to be personally responsible for their failures-in precisely the way that human capital theory describes. By the time students enter community college, their eventual outcomes are largely determined. Since community colleges themselves did not poorly prepare their entrants, they cannot be faulted for helping them realize that they must lower their expectations. Yet the poor information that youth got in high school is not a visible target by the time students are in college.

The above description suggests that students' perceptions of college requirements are key to their efforts in high school and to their college attainments. It can be posed as a model with several elements:

1.Many seniors believe they can attain college plans with low high school achievement.

2.Students with these beliefs, including college-bound students, exert little effort in high school.

3.Such beliefs are partly correct-students can enter college even if they have low

achievement.

4.High school achievement predicts degree completion, but students' plans do not anticipate this relationship.

5.High school achievement predicts much of the lower attainment and disappointed plans of disadvantaged students.

6.High school achievement is no less important in open-door colleges than in other colleges.

This paper takes these contentions as hypotheses, and it presents analyses to test them empirically. The analyses support these hypotheses, and they pose serious challenges to current practices. This paper concludes that shielding high school seniors from the realities of college demands and allowing them to hold unrealistic plans is not a kindness. It is a deception that prevents students from taking actions to improve their achievement or to revise their plans to make better use of high school. Students with unrealistic plans should be so informed, and they should be encouraged to increase their efforts or to develop back-up plans and preparation.

DATA AND METHODS

This report is based on three kinds of data. First, students' perceptions are described using detailed interviews with a non-random sample of high school seniors in two high schools. Second, students' views are systematically analyzed using a survey of 2091 seniors, administered to a random sample of classes at 12 high schools across the Chicago metropolitan area in 1992-94. The schools and sample are diverse in ethnicity and SES backgrounds, and are described in detail elsewhere (Rosenbaum & Roy, 1996).

Third, students' outcomes are assessed using the recent release of the twelve-year follow-up of the High School and Beyond 1980 sophomores (NCES, 1983). This national sample was first surveyed in 1980 (as sophomores) and were

subsequently surveyed in 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1992. Of the original 14,825 sophomores in 1980, the survey obtained responses from 95 percent in 1982 (n=14,102), and 85 percent in 1992 (n=12,640). This survey provides a unique opportunity for a long-term study of the determinants of educational attainment. This paper studies the outcomes for the individuals responding in both the 1982 and 1992 surveys.

FINDINGS

Many Seniors Believe They Can Attain College Plans With Low High School Achievement.

Economic theory is a good model of our common-sense assumptions. For instance, human capital theory explains students' achievement using two factors: students' inherent capabilities and their efforts to invest in themselves. The theory says students will invest in themselves and exert effort in school because they know there is a societal payoff.

While it is widely assumed that students believe that school efforts have a payoff, this assumption is rarely examined. Do students believe that school effort and achievement are relevant and helpful in improving their future careers? Of course, teachers tell this to students, but it is clearly in teachers' own self-interest to convince students of their own importance. As parents and teachers often notice, one of the less convenient aspects of adolescence is the cognitive capacity that enables them to doubt what they are told.

Stinchcombe (1965) hypothesized that (1) many students believe that school is not relevant to their future careers, and (2) students' school efforts are determined not only by their internal motivation, but also by their perceptions of schools' future relevance. While economists assume that incentives exist and are seen, Stinchcombe suggests this may not be true for work-bound students.

Unfortunately, while Stinchcombe provided an intriguing model, his small sample and simple bivariate analyses (on a card-sorter in the pre-computer age) were too simple for a convincing test.

To examine these ideas, a non-random sample of 50 students were interviewed about how they thought about the relevance of school. Consistent with the dictum, "the more things change, the more they stay the same," these interviews in 1993 found similar sentiments to those Stinchcombe found thirty years previously. Many students reported that school is not relevant to their future careers. Yet something had changed. While Stinchcombe found that only work-bound students expressed these beliefs in 1960, these sentiments were also expressed by college-bound students in 1993. Many students who planned to attend college report that high school achievement is not relevant to their future careers. Their comments suggest that the vast expansion of community colleges over the past thirty years contributed to their views. One student notes, "high school doesn't really matter..., because ...junior college is not such a big deal to get into" (#42). Said another, "if you could apply yourself [in junior college], you'd get better grades" [regardless of how you did in high school] (#27). Many students agree with the student who sees the "two-year college as another chance for someone who's messed up in high school" (#39). This second chance is also viewed as making high school effort less relevant. As one student says in explaining why he does not try hard in high school, "I think college is much more important than high school" (#16).

To examine Stinchcombe's hypotheses more systematically, survey items were constructed that reflect two aspects of individuals' perceptions of schools' relevance: (1) whether students believe that high school education has relevance for their future success (hereafter "future relevance"); (2) whether students believe that there is no penalty if they have poor school performance (hereafter "no-penalty" attitude). The first variable refers to students' belief that high school can

help their future careers; the second refers to beliefs that bad school performance (even if possibly relevant) is not necessarily a barrier to attaining their future careers.[1]

Surveys were administered to 2091 high school seniors enrolled in 12 city and suburban high schools in a large, Midwestern metropolitan area. Just as Stinchcombe found, the survey finds that many students doubt school's future relevance. This is not only true for work-bound students; almost as many college-bound students hold such beliefs. On five-point scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, 30 to 40 percent of students do not agree with such statements as, "my courses give me useful preparation I'll need in life" (39 percent for whole sample; 37 percent for college-bound respondents), "school teaches me valuable skills" (30 percent; college-bound 28 percent), and "getting a good job depends on how well you do at school" (36.6 percent; college-bound 36.5 percent). These items are summed to create a scale for "future relevance."

For the items in our "no-penalty" scale, similar patterns are evident. Almost 46 percent of students agree with the item "Even if I do not work hard in high school, I can still make my future plans come true" (46 percent; college-bound 44 percent). While educators want students to believe that students with bad grades rarely get college degrees or good jobs, many students disagree with the first point (regarding graduation from two-year colleges, 40.7 percent for whole sample; 41.2 percent for the college-bound), and almost as many disagree with the second (getting good jobs after high school, 38 percent; college-bound 33 percent). Most surprisingly, despite many campaigns against dropping out of high school, over 40 percent of seniors do not disagree with the statement "people can do OK even if they drop out of high school" (44 percent; college-bound 41 percent). Apparently, many students see no penalty to their planned careers if they do not have high school diplomas, good grades, or work hard in school. These items are summed to create a scale for "no penalty."

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The two scales of "future relevance" and "no penalty" are correlated, but the correlation is far from perfect (r=.30). Students who plan to get a college degree have a somewhat higher sense of schools' "future relevance," and a lesser sense that there is "no penalty" if they do poorly in high school, than students without college plans, but the difference is small (about one-third of a standard deviation). Moreover, these beliefs vary substantially within these groups, and the variation is similar within both groups (standard deviations of .61-.65).

Students With These Beliefs Exert Little Effort In High School.

While there is nothing wrong with students having optimistic hopes, we would be concerned if students respond to these beliefs by reducing their efforts. This section examines 1) what factors may determine future relevance and no penalty beliefs, 2) what factors may determine students' school efforts, and 3) whether these beliefs mediate the potential influence of other factors on students' school efforts and have independent influences on students' school efforts.

The antecedents of future relevance and no-penalty beliefs are first examined. The survey asked three or more items relating to locus of control, parent support, teacher help, school help, peer pro-school influences, and peer anti-school (rebellion) influences. Items were factor analyzed, and scales constructed. All had alpha coefficients over .70. The survey also asked race, ethnicity, parents' education and occupation, and gender (for details, see Rosenbaum & Roy, 1996).

First, regressions (OLS) find that both future relevance and no-penalty are strongly explained by parent support for school, teacher help, and personal locus of control. Peers and low-SES also have significant coefficients, but gender and race do not (Table 1, columns 1 & 2).

Second, we examine the antecedents of students' school effort. Effort is measured by a scale combining students' reports of their behaviors-how much

time they spend on homework and three other items: I just do enough to pass my classes, I try to do my best in school, I only work in school if I'm worried about failing (on five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Like previous research (Kandel & Lesser, 1972), these analyses find that students' school efforts are explained by parent, peer, and school variables (Table 1, column 3). Males and low-SES have negative coefficients, but ethnicity has no influence. Students' locus of control has a large significant coefficient.

Third, when future relevance and no-penalty are added, they mediate much of the potential influence of parents, school help, teacher help, and locus of control, but relatively little of the potential influence of the two peer variables (column 4). They also reduce the negative coefficient of SES to insignificance. After controlling for other factors, future relevance and no-penalty have strong and significant independent coefficients (standardized coefficients of .155 for future relevance, -.145 for "no penalty," column 4). These beliefs have large and significant independent associations with effort, perhaps indicating strong effects in reducing students' school efforts.

These findings have implications for theory and practice. Theoretically, this study supports Stinchcombe's hypothesis. Students vary in whether they see school as relevant to their future lives, and this variable is strongly associated with their school efforts. In addition, this study identifies a second measure, the "no penalty" belief, and it shows that both sets of beliefs have significant, independent relationships with school effort.

These results imply that some youth have misread the American emphasis on opportunity. While Americans want society to provide "second chances" to youth, Stevenson and Stigler (1992) warn that youth might misinterpret this to mean that school failures never matter and effort is not needed. This study finds that many youth see very little penalty to avoiding school work and little payoff to high school, and these beliefs may justify their poor effort in high school.

Of course, it is possible that causality goes in the other direction, that individuals rationalize their poor effort by denying future relevance. However, these views, whether beliefs or rationalizations, are held by 40 percent of students, so they are not just the problems of a few individuals. Indeed, since guidance counselors do not challenge these beliefs, part of the problem arises from school practices (Rosenbaum, Miller & Krei, 1996). Even if these views arise as rationalizations, they are not effectively challenged by schools, and they represent misconceptions that encourage a continuing cycle of further low effort.

Students Can Enter College Even If They Have Low Achievement.

Are students wrong when they say school achievement is not relevant to their futures? Community colleges are frequently seen as "second chance" institutions for those who have done poorly before, offering open admissions, low tuition, and remedial courses. In some community college departments, remedial courses may be 40 percent of the courses offered. Over 40 percent of freshmen at public two-year colleges take one or more years of remedial coursework, just to acquire the skills they did not learn in high school (NCES, 1995).

Although sociologists have produced extensive research showing that grades are strongly related to college attendance (Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977; Porter, 1974), much of this research is based on studies from the 1960s and 1970s. Yet college admissions has changed a great deal since 1960. As noted, the five-fold growth of community colleges has dramatically increased opportunities to go to college, and fewer students are likely to face barriers to access to college.

Moreover, community colleges have initiated open-admissions policies and remedial courses to reduce the academic barriers to college. In the past, college admission standards compelled lower-achieving students to confront their unrealistic college plans. While college admission standards were a severe barrier to college for low-achieving students in 1960, admission standards are now

practically non-existent in community colleges. For example, Illinois high school graduates can attend a community college even if they have Ds and no college-prep courses (after age 21, even a diploma is not required). In addition, a full array of remedial courses provide high-school-level curricula in the community colleges to improve students' chances of success (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Grubb & Kalman, 1994).

Are students correct in the belief that high school performance is not relevant to their educational outcomes? The HSB data indicate that poor high school performance does not prevent college attendance. Even students with low grades (Cs or lower) can attend college. Indeed, 27 percent of students enrolling in two-year colleges had low grades in high school. That is only slightly less than the proportion of students with low grades who did not enroll in any postsecondary education (30 percent). Obviously, low grades are not a barrier to enrolling in two-year colleges. College-bound students who think high school effort is irrelevant to their future plans are partly correct-high school grades are not an obstacle to enrollment at two-year colleges.

High School Achievement Predicts Degree Completion, But Students' Plans Do Not Anticipate This Relationship.

Having found that many students believe high school achievement is not relevant and, indeed, that many students with low grades can enter two-year colleges, one must wonder whether these students are correct that high school achievement is not relevant to college attainment. Or do these beliefs lead students to make plans that they will be unable to realize? This section addresses these questions with simple percentages and the next section uses multivariate analyses.

These analyses emphasize grades because all students know their grades, so students could use this knowledge, if they chose to do so. But do they choose

to do so? Because most people have had a few teachers who gave arbitrary or unfair grades, grades are often dismissed as erroneous and irrelevant. Yet knowledge of scale construction suggests that averaging grades eliminates random idiosyncrasies and might make grade averages a meaningful indicator. This section examines whether students' cumulative grade point averages in high school predict college outcomes.

The analyses find that many students with college plans fail to attain college degrees, and high school grades strongly predict which students fail at their college plans. Of the 12,475 seniors, 8795 (70 percent) planned to get a college degree (AA or higher) in their senior year in high school. Many seniors (4103 of the 12,475) had low grades (Cs or lower), yet more than 50 percent of those with low grades still planned to get a college degree (n=2086).

However, low grades have a strong impact on actual educational attainment. Among all seniors with college plans (AA or higher), 40 percent succeed in getting a college degree (AA or higher) in the 10 years after high school (Table 2a). However, low high school grades cut students' chances in half- only 20 percent of seniors with low grades attained their college plans.

Of all the seniors planning to get a BA or higher (n=5528), only half succeed in getting the BA (Table 2b). Students with As have a 71 percent chance of getting a BA or higher, and those with Bs have a 47 percent chance. Of the students planning BAs who have a C-average or less, only 20 percent (n=916) get BA degrees. It might be noted that 73 percent of those with poor grades do little homework (less than an hour per week), and low homework time decreases their BA chances to only 11 percent.

Since the AA is a shorter and perhaps easier degree than a BA, one might expect that students planning to get AA degrees are more likely to be successful. That is not the case. Seniors who planned to get an AA degree succeed less often than those planning a BA. Of the 3267 seniors who plan to get an AA degree,

only 24 percent succeed in getting a college degree (AA or higher) in the next 10 years, and for those with low grades (Cs or lower), only 13 percent do (Table 2c). The success rates are even lower for those with low grades who did little homework (less than an hour a week; n=248). Recall that these tables are explaining students' college-degree outcomes, based only on their high school grades, giving youth ten years to attain any college degree (AA or higher).

Why do over half of seniors with low grades believe they can hold college plans? Perhaps "social promotion" practices in high schools, which automatically promote students each year to the next grade regardless of their achievement, may encourage this belief. Similarly, open admissions at community colleges may contribute to this belief. Seeing these two practices that award attainments without requiring academic achievement, students may infer a similar view of college degrees, as an award for putting in time that does not require academic achievement. This may also suggest that students view school as a credentialing process rather than a human-capital-building process.

Ironically, although the colleges offering AA degrees are more accessible than BA colleges to students with low grades, the AA degree is not necessarily more available to them. Students with AA plans have lower success rates at their plans than students with BA plans, both because students with AA plans are twice as likely to have low grades, and because their chances of getting the degree are very slim if they have low grades (12.6 percent). Multivariate analyses indicate that grades and homework time explain most of this differential success rate between those with BA and AA plans (Rosenbaum & Miller, 1998).

Newspaper stories sometimes report that students who got As in high school actually lack the academic skills to do well in college. This may explain our findings that only half the students with As in high school complete an AA degree or higher (although low SES seems to be more important than low test scores in explaining these failures). Yet newspapers rarely consider the other

issue, that students with Cs in high school have very little chance of completing a college degree, and their plans do not seem to recognize these risks.

In sum, many students report that they plan to get a college degree even though they have poor academic achievement, yet in fact low grades predict much lower chances of attaining a degree. Over 80 percent of students with low grades who planned to get a college degree failed to do so, and the failures were even greater for those planning an AA degree. Even without making any causal inferences, the strong predictive power of high school grades is important—it tells seniors how to place their bets. While students are correct that they can enter a college with low grades, they are usually mistaken in thinking that they can complete the degree. Their poor success rates make these outcomes a long shot, not something students should be counting on.

High School Achievement Predicts Much Of The Lower Attainment And Disappointed Plans Of Disadvantaged Students.

While the strong predictive power of high school grades tells seniors how to place their bets, do grades really predict educational attainment after controlling for other factors? If students want to raise their chances, they need to know whether to focus on improving grades, homework time, or track placement, and they may be worried that their future attainment is predestined by their social background (SES, ethnicity, gender) or intelligence (as test scores are sometimes interpreted). Policy makers also need to know to what extent grades or other factors predict the lower outcomes and disappointed plans of disadvantaged students.

Regression analysis is an ideal way to examine these issues. It allows researchers to look at simple gross associations between background characteristics and attainment, and then to examine the mediating and independent predicting power of other factors, such as high school achievement. We ran a

22 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

series of OLS regressions on the HSB cohort who graduated in 1982 and were followed through 1992. The survey had 8969 respondents with information on all variables in our model.

These analyses used five dependent variables: students' cumulative grade point averages, tested achievement, homework time, educational plans, and educational attainment. The first four are information gathered in students' senior year (1982); educational attainment is students' years of educational attainment in 1992 (EdYears). The independent variables include social background variables (black, Hispanic, female, and a cumulative index of parents' SES computed in the HSB file), region of the US (south, west, and northeast regions, with the midwest as the comparison), and school variables (private school, general and vocational tracks, with college track as the comparison). Regressions on plans and educational attainment add grade point average, tested achievement, and homework time as independent variables.

First, blacks, Hispanics, and low-SES students have much lower grades and achievement test scores (Table 3, columns 1 & 3). If these coefficients indicate influences, they are partly mediated by track and private schools (columns 2 & 4). Even after controls, blacks, Hispanics, and low SES youth have much lower grades and test scores.

Second, SES and blacks are strongly associated with homework time, although in different directions (column 5), and the SES relationship is only partly diminished after controls (column 6). While low SES youth spend much less time on homework than high SES youth, blacks spend significantly more time on homework than whites (Hispanics spend the same as whites). Despite potential concerns because homework time is self-reported, Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) findings would predict that blacks would under-report school effort (to avoid being seen as "acting white"), and these analyses find the opposite (Fordham and Ogbu's prediction was also not supported in Cook and Ludwig's (1997) analysis.).

If homework time turns out to be an important predictor of educational attainment, then it may account for problems of low-SES students, but it is not likely to do so for blacks.

Third, low-SES youth have much lower educational plans, but blacks have higher plans than whites (column 7). These results remain after controls for track and private school (column 8). The SES relationship declines considerably after controlling for grades, tests, and homework time, but the positive association for blacks increases (column 9). Blacks have even higher plans than others with similar achievement, as previous research has noted (Jencks, Smith, Acland, Bane, Cohen, Gintis, Heyns, & Michaelson, 1972).

Fourth, black, Hispanic, and low-SES youth have much lower educational attainment (column 10). These relationships are only slightly altered after controls for track and private schools (column 11). However, these relationships are largely mediated by grades, test scores, and homework time. Indeed, when grades, test scores, and homework time are added, the SES relationship declines substantially (from .324 to .201), although it remains strong, and the black and Hispanic coefficients actually reverse and become significantly positive (column 12). Thus, students' grades, homework time, and tested achievement explain a large part of the lower attainment of low-SES students, and black and Hispanic students have higher attainments than whites with similar achievement.

Finally, by adding seniors' plans to the regression, the analyses can discover which high school information predicts the disappointing attainments of disadvantaged students many years later (Table 4). Since a few students (8 percent) attain more than they planned, they are removed from the analyses in Table 4, leaving 8117 students in the analyses.[2] As a result, Table 4 shows the factors predicting which students' attainments fall short of their plans-explaining discrepancies between the 32 percent of students who attain their senior-year plans and the 60 percent who attain one or more years less than they planned. The

analyses find that low-SES, black, and Hispanic students have significantly lower attainments than they had planned (Table 4, column 1). However, when variables for school achievement and effort are added, the ethnic variables become insignificant and the SES coefficient becomes smaller (Table 4, column 3). Apparently, the disappointments of black and Hispanic students are entirely predictable from their lower achievement and effort in high school.

Indeed, students' plans do not take sufficient account of their achievement. Over 58 percent (.142/.244) of the relationship between test scores and attainment, and 78 percent (.173/.221) of the relationship between grades and attainment, remain after controlling for plans (Table 4, columns 2 & 3). Less than half these relationships are mediated by plans. Thus, consistent with the cross-tabular analyses (Table 2), we conclude that, even after controls, seniors' college plans vastly underestimate how much their grades and test scores predict their ultimate educational outcomes.

It is noteworthy that the female coefficient on educational attainment, which is virtually zero in the early regressions (Table 3, column 10), becomes significantly negative after controlling for achievement (column 12). Apparently, women have the same educational attainments as males, but their attainments are still below what they would be if their previous achievement were the only determinant. Females have higher grades and homework time than males (but slightly lower test scores, Table 3, columns 1-6), so there should be some concern about why their attainments are lower than their achievement would predict.

Finally, while the above analyses look at simple additive effects of ethnicity, one might still wonder if some of the factors in our model have different coefficients for blacks and whites. One indication of bias is when blacks get less benefit from their achievements than whites. In the 1970s, Porter (1974) found that blacks received less gain in educational attainment from their high school grades than whites did. The present regressions on educational attainment run

separately for whites and blacks find that grades have about the same coefficients for both (Table 4, columns 4 and 6-betas .224 and .214), and the same is true for test scores (.228 and .227), but homework has slightly larger coefficients for whites than for blacks (.114 vs. .071).[3] Thus, blacks get as much increase in attainment for increases in their test scores and grades as whites do, although they get slightly less gain for increases in their homework time. Apparently, the old pattern of discrimination in which blacks got lower attainment benefits for increasing their grades is no longer the case. Indeed, SES, test scores, and grades are somewhat stronger predictors of attainment falling short of plans for blacks than for whites (Table 4, columns 5 & 7).

In sum, these results indicate that SES, ethnicity, private schools, and track are related to attainment, but grades, test scores, and homework time also have strong relationships, which mediate much of the relationship between disadvantaged backgrounds and attainment. However, there are indications that many students do not realize how much high school achievement predicts future attainment. While all students probably know their grades, their plans underestimate the extent that their grades predict their later attainment, and this is true for both black and white students. Indeed, grades are the single best predictor of the ways attainment falls short of plans, and this predictability is somewhat larger for blacks than for whites. If students could focus on changing one attribute in high school to make their plans come true, they should improve their grades.[4,5]

Thus, these analyses suggest that students are overly complacent about the ease of getting a college degree. Many students have plans that never had a high chance of succeeding, because their plans underestimate the relationship between high school achievement and later attainment. This is particularly true for blacks, Hispanics, and low-SES students, whose attainments fall short of their plans, and these disappointments are largely predicted by their high school achievements (Table 4, columns 1 & 3). It seems likely that these students would have worked

harder if they had realized the future relevance of high school achievement.

High School Achievement Is No Less Important In Open-Door Colleges.

As noted, students believe that colleges will give them a second chance where they can escape their past, and previous problems will not be a barrier. They feel their high school experience is not relevant. Students often refer to open-door community colleges in stating these beliefs. Do open-door colleges offer all students second chances regardless of past social background or achievement? Or do students from lower social backgrounds or with lower achievements have lower success rates? If students really want a college degree, can they get it in spite of past poor achievement?

Community colleges offer many programs that would seem designed to deliver on the promise of second chances. Community colleges offer a wide range of remedial programs and courses that are adapted to students with gaps in their preparation. However, most previous studies of community college effects have not had sufficiently long-term follow-up data to assess outcomes (Grubb & Kalman, 1994). Since many community college students enroll part-time and/or take remedial courses, follow-ups four years after high school graduation may not give enough time to indicate degree completion. The present ten-year follow-up survey is particularly suited to assessing outcomes.

When students assess their college prospects, one reason they disregard high school effort is their belief that high school grades are poor indicators of achievement. Although grades are the one kind of information all students get about their achievement, few students believe that grades predict college success. Moreover, many adults have the same view, criticizing grades as subjective, idiosyncratic, and arbitrary, varying by teachers and by schools. Many adults recall instances where teachers gave them unfair grades. Indeed, many adults, including counselors and teachers, doubt that high school grades predict future

success (Rosenbaum, unpublished). Therefore, the one kind of information that all students get about their achievement is often dismissed as irrelevant.

Perhaps the only indicator that some people trust is tested ability. In contrast with Japanese people, who believe that effort is more important than ability, Americans tend to believe that ability is the key to success, that students can do little to alter their inherent ability, and therefore that effort is largely irrelevant (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). This belief leads youth to expect that inherent ability will determine their college success, and that their high school efforts and grades are fairly irrelevant. The belief in "ability" further supports students' belief that high school achievement is irrelevant.

This section examines whether past background and achievement have less influence in open-door colleges than in other colleges. Do open-door colleges free students for second chances, unrestrained by their past history? We contrast the process for open-door colleges with the process for non-open-door colleges. The latter comprise a wide variety of colleges, but they are distinct in that they announce admissions criteria and they generally have higher financial costs of attendance.

The staff at NCES coded a sample of colleges in terms of their selectivity. Colleges coded as "open-door college" were attended by 1090 students, and "non-open-door" colleges by 1483 students. This section compares these two sets of colleges. For the variables in our model, missing values reduce the sample to 590 students in open-door colleges and 973 students in the non-open-door colleges.[6]

Instead of examining the full scale of educational attainment as before, these analyses examine the dichotomous distinction between attaining Associates (AA) or higher degrees vs. not attaining any degrees. The AA is the main degree granted by community colleges, and it is increasingly recognized as having economic value by employers. We use the same predictive variables as previously, except that educational plans correspond to our dichotomous outcome

variable (EdPlanAA=1 if students plan AA or higher degrees, EdPlanAA=0 if not).

Examining the means and standard deviations of the variables describing students in the two types of colleges, the results are largely as expected (Table 5). Students in open-door colleges are from lower SES background and have lower achievement and less homework time. There is a higher concentration of Hispanics, but surprisingly there are slightly fewer African Americans (for which we have no explanation). However, it is noteworthy that the variations in the key independent and dependent variables are quite comparable in the two groups. Indeed, the standard deviation of AAPlus, grades and homework time are similar in the two types of colleges and are actually larger in test scores and tracks in open-door colleges than in other colleges. Thus, if we find that tracking or test scores have less influence in open-door colleges (as we do), it is not because these variables have less variation in open-door colleges than in other colleges. If grades have more influence in open-door colleges (as we indeed find), it is not because they have more variation in these colleges.[7]

First, we run the model for all students who attended colleges for which we have selectivity scores (Table 6a). We find that degree completion is lower in the west and for students from higher SES and college tracks. In addition, test scores, grades and homework time significantly increase the chances of degree completion. Moreover, all of these factors continue having significant effects after controlling for students' educational plans in senior year (Table 6b). This suggests that students do not take sufficient account of these factors in making their plans.

Second, we run the model for students who attend non-open-door colleges (Table 7a). In the first step, only four variables are significant-SES, test scores, homework time, and grades. In the second step, adding plans, the results are similar except that homework time drops out of significance (Table 7b).

Finally, we run the model for students who attend open-door colleges

(Table 8a). In the first step, SES, test scores, and grades have significant influences. Thus, the same factors predict degree attainment in open-door and non-open-door colleges. However, while homework time, test scores, and SES have slightly smaller influence in open-door colleges than in other colleges, grades have somewhat larger influences in open-door colleges (these differences are not statistically significant). However, in the second step, after adding plans, grades are the only significant influence (Table 8b). Thus, in open-door colleges, students do not take sufficient account of the influence of grades in making their plans, and, indeed, grades are the only factor that is not sufficiently in their plans.

These results are somewhat different from students' views. As students expect, they can partly escape their social background influence by going to open-door colleges. Although SES has an influence in these colleges, its influence is fully built into their educational plans. Similarly, if we interpret test scores as measures of ability (as is customarily done), then these results indicate that ability has a smaller influence on degree attainment in open-door colleges than in other colleges, and its effect is fully built into students' educational plans. However, students' belief that open-door colleges make high school grades irrelevant is clearly incorrect. Grades are equally or more important in open-door colleges than in other colleges. Indeed, net of initial plans, grades are the only factor with a significant influence in making degree attainment depart from initial plans.

CONCLUSION

Should Colleges Tell Youth That Second Chances Are Second Best?

Contrary to those who criticize community colleges for cooling-out students' plans, college students' problems are likely to arise from earlier causes. The problem does not arise at the cooling-out stage, it arose much earlier, as Goffman's model would suggest.

How did we come to create a situation where college-bound high school seniors have low grades, do no homework, and believe that high school is irrelevant to their future goals and that poor school performance will impose no penalty for their plans? Students are wasting their time in high school, and they don't realize that this will hurt their future prospects. Many students have unrealistic views about the requirements for college success, they make plans that don't take account of the high-school factors that will influence their college attainments, and they fail to take actions that would improve their ultimate attainment. When students who have exerted no effort in high school because they thought it was irrelevant subsequently have difficulties in college, they should not be surprised, and colleges should not be blamed for having to help students reduce their expectations.

How did students' misconceptions arise? Counselors are partly at fault, but colleges may also be contributing to this situation. Counselors respond to the information they get from colleges, and we must wonder whether colleges are doing enough to inform counselors and students about their true requirements. Instead of blaming community colleges for cooling-out students' plans, perhaps we should wonder whether community colleges could do more to inform high school counselors and students.

Second chances are a fundamental American tenet. Open-admission policies tell youth that their past difficulties will not be held against them, remedial programs tell students that their achievement deficiencies can be overcome, and colleges rightly strive to avoid stigmatizing students who take remedial classes. However, these practices may inadvertently send messages to students that high school is irrelevant, that there are no penalties for poor effort in high school, and may prevent youth from realizing that they should not count on second chances as their main strategy for success.

Colleges have a difficult balancing act: they must tell students that

"Second chances are available," but they must also announce that "Second chances are second best." Second-chance programs sometimes work, but they rarely work as well as "first chances"-meeting achievement requirements the first time. While students have gotten the message about the availability of second chances, they have not always realized that second chances pose difficult challenges. If students enter college with poor grades, they will have to face a lot of hard work to catch up, and they will have much lower chances of getting a degree. It is admirable for colleges to offer "second chances," but it is imperative for colleges to convey the message that high school grades are the best predictor of degree attainment, even at open-door colleges. Indeed, these findings indicate that this is also true in community colleges, perhaps even more than in other colleges.

Looking at these results, some might blame youth for their failures, but another interpretation is more plausible. Students' plans are what they think they can expect in the future, and their plans are likely to influence their high school efforts. Our finding that students' plans do not take sufficient account of grades' influence on their ultimate attainments implies that students do not realize how much high school grades affect their actual prospects. This is consistent with the future relevance and "no-penalty" beliefs noted earlier. These results suggest that colleges and high schools are failing to provide clear information to these youth about the factors that will influence what they can realistically expect.

What is the harm in letting students have "high expectations?" Perhaps these plans are just dreams that make students a little happier and do them little harm. This seems to be the belief of some guidance counselors, who say they do not want to disappoint young people and so they encourage all students to attend college, even students with low achievement (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996).

Consistent with this, Manski (1989) has proposed that many youth begin community college as an "experiment," a low-cost way to discover whether they

can make it in college. But is it really low cost? Manski analyzes the process from the viewpoint of a student who is already in a community college, noting that his analysis does not consider students before they enter college.

However, there are opportunity costs to any decision, and this "experiment" has some large opportunity costs to students while they are still in high school. Should students with more than an 80 percent chance of failing at college place all their bets on their college experiment? Or would it be prudent for such students to hedge their college bets?

The first opportunity cost of the college-for-all norm is that students' high expectations may inadvertently encourage them to see high school as irrelevant and thus to make poor use of high school. Our interviews and survey of high school seniors indicate that 40 percent of students with college plans believe that high school is irrelevant. Postponing the key test for whether one is "college-bound" until after high school may inadvertently tell students that high school achievement is not important.

The second opportunity cost of the college-for-all norm is that it may lead to a lack of effort. Human capital theory posits that people invest effort in improving their capabilities if they believe better outcomes will result. But if they believe they can get the same outcomes without added effort, they will not make the effort. If students realized that their low high school grades would block their college plans, they would probably increase their efforts. Yet a large majority (78 percent) of poorly achieving students with college plans do less than an hour a day of homework, and many (25 percent) do less than an hour in a whole week (12 minutes a day). These students exert little effort, even though they have low grades (which predict an 80 percent failure rate). Moreover, community colleges do very little to prevent these students from holding unrealistic plans, perhaps because they wish to encourage "high expectations" and "second chances" (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). Students are not told what level of high

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school achievement is needed to succeed in community college, and they are lulled into a complacency that leaves them unprepared for getting college degrees.

The third opportunity cost of the college-for-all norm is that students with little prospect for getting a college degree will fail to get vocational training. Encouraging poorly achieving students to delay their work preparation until they see the results of their college "experiment" makes it likely that they will make poor use of vocational preparation in high school, which has been shown to improve earnings (Campbell, Basinger, Dauner, & Parks, 1986; Kang & Bishop, 1986; Rosenbaum, 1996). Indeed, students with poor grades are less likely to be in vocational courses if they have college plans than if they are not planning college (Rosenbaum, unpublished analyses), and many students with low probability of success in college have no back-up plans or training. Similarly, many public schools (such as those in Chicago) have reduced or ended their vocational programs because they expect all students to delay their vocational decisions until they get to college.

Although Manski does not consider it, there is a less-expensive experiment to help students infer their readiness for college-high school. If the CFA norm did not focus so much on getting everyone into college, community colleges could be candid about the importance of high school grades, and high schools could tell students their realistic chances of attaining college degrees. If students realized that high school achievement is the first "experiment" with strong predictive power, then students with poor grades would either revise their plans down, or they would spend more than 12 minutes a day on homework.

Protecting students' high expectations when they are unwarranted is not a kindness; it is a deception. Failing to challenge students to examine the plausibility of their college plans has serious opportunity costs-it prevents them from seeing the importance of high school, it prevents them from making the additional efforts that might make their plans more likely to come true, and it

prevents them from preparing for alternative outcomes. When some seniors have high school records that make their college plans highly likely to fail, schools' protection of their "high expectations" is not a kind gesture. It looks more like the confidence scheme that Goffman describes, distracting the "mark" from taking other constructive actions.

This seems to be a new problem, and it is likely to have arisen from the increased incidence of open-admissions and remedial programs. Ironically, students have learned about the changes in colleges very quickly, but incompletely. Students understand very well the short-term consequences of their high school efforts-they are minor. But they assume that this means that high school achievement and effort are irrelevant, and that there will be no penalty if they do badly in high school. They believe they can postpone their efforts until they get into college, and their plans will work out fine.[8] Under such circumstances, students' perceptions will not improve unless policy action is taken, and community colleges have a major role in addressing these problems.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The community college system, open admissions policies, and remedial programs are rightfully sources of pride. They have created new opportunities for large numbers of youth. However, they may inadvertently contribute to students' complacency. Students with low grades have seen that they can enter college and get courses to address their achievement deficiencies, but students may not realize that they have very poor prospects of getting a degree.

Community colleges are partly responsible for such delusions. Many high school guidance counselors believe that open admission means that they do not have to discourage students' college expectations. They believe that "high expectations" should be encouraged, and they report that they get complaints from parents and principals if they try to discourage unrealistically high plans

(Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). Community colleges need to do more to provide information to counselors so they can convey realistic advice to students about the requirements for degree completion. Community colleges need to inform counselors and students about open admissions and remedial courses, but they also need to be clear that students should try to master high school skills before they enter college. It is possible to defer these efforts, but that reduces one's chances of success.

While policy has focussed on opening college admissions at community colleges, it has not devoted similar effort to providing clear information about the requirements for completing degrees (Orfield, 1997; Paul, 1997; Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1997). Indeed, many community colleges seem to encourage all students to enter, which lulls students into a complacency that their high school achievement is irrelevant. Instead, community colleges should be telling students that their high school grades could inform them about their likelihood of attaining a college degree. Unfortunately, this fact is hidden from students, and perhaps even from teachers and counselors.

To return to Goffman's model, the CFA norm is highly misleading and does great harm to youth. It offers big promises to students, without warning that few low-achieving students will get a college degree. Indeed, it leaves many youth worse off than before, keeping them in the dark about actual requirements so they fail to take suitable actions to prepare themselves to accomplish their plans. It also harms youth as they waste time, energy, and money on a college experience they are ill-prepared to handle and that is likely to lead to failure, low self-esteem, and misused opportunities in high school. While high school counselors brag about their college enrollment rates, students will blame themselves for their failure, which was highly predictable.

Colleges, especially community colleges, can do a great deal to inform students about the requirements for degree completion. This is a bit tricky. On the

one hand, community colleges do not want to discourage students from attending, and, indeed, there is a large consensus that most students can benefit, regardless of their past achievement. Nor do community colleges want to stigmatize students who take remedial courses. Stigma does these students no good and much harm.

However, community colleges must realize that their message does not just go to high school seniors; it also goes to younger students, and it tells them what actions they must take to improve their future prospects. The present findings suggest that students have misinterpreted the message from community colleges, and their misinterpretation has led them to reduce their efforts and to believe that high school achievement and grades are irrelevant to their future attainments. Many students underestimate the effects of grades in preventing the attainment of their plans. We must wonder what more community colleges can do to remedy this problem without giving up on their efforts to offer second chances. Community colleges are already over-burdened with activities. However, the following proposed actions will make it easier for community colleges to do their present tasks and to do them more successfully.

First, *community colleges should provide detailed information on degree-completion rates as a function of students' grades or test scores.* This could be aided by a universally recognized test of achievement (not aptitude or intelligence), either state-wide (like Illinois's IGAP achievement test) or national (like President Clinton's proposal for national proficiency examinations). Even if such tests are not available, grades can be used. While the grades from individual teachers are highly imperfect, grade-point averages cancel out teacher idiosyncrasies and have strong predictive power (stronger than test scores in some of these analyses). Schools and society should be stressing their importance to students. Students need to realize that "open admissions" does not mean that high school achievement is irrelevant.

Second, *community colleges should inform students that "second chances*

are second best." While community colleges should continue to go to extensive efforts to offer second chances, students need to realize that it is easier to expend the effort to learn the high school curriculum the first time than to face it again in remedial courses, which take time, cost tuition, and offer no college credits.

Third, *linkages between high schools and colleges may help improve high school students' understanding of college requirements.* For example, one linkage program put low-achieving high school students in the same remedial college courses that community college students were taking. This experience conveyed a clear message to high school students: they could learn the material now or later. But the latter choice meant that they must take the same courses next year, paying tuition and getting no college credit. The future relevance of their efforts was evident. Linkages can help high school students see that high school achievement is highly relevant to their future goals.

Fourth, *new reforms like tech-prep and 2+2 programs provide linkages that coordinate high school and college programs*, which may help students see the future relevance of their current courses (Berryman & Bailey, 1992; Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting, & Dornsife, 1995). For instance, tech-prep and 2+2 programs coordinate high school and college curricula so that students progress seamlessly from high school to college, receiving full credit for their high school work. High school students can see how their high school courses help them progress into the college courses. These programs define career-preparation as continuous between high school and college, and thus high-school efforts advance students up the same ladder that continues in college.

It is understandable that many community college staff may see these programs as superfluous distractions from their main efforts to provide a college education. However, community college staff have a choice. They can ignore high schools and accept the fact that many students will enter with plans that do not match their preparation, and then they will find that they are stuck with the

unpleasant and time-consuming task of cooling-out students' plans. Or they can spend time building linkages to high schools and informing counselors and students what actions students can take to make their preparation match their plans. Given the extensive misconceptions and failures that now result from the former choice, linkages and information efforts are not superfluous, they are central to the mission of community colleges.

NOTES

1.Somewhat similar beliefs have been shown to influence students' achievements (Mickelson, 1990), but since achievement is influenced by many factors besides motivation, this study has chosen to focus on the determinants of effort (cf. also Steinberg, 1996, for an excellent overview).

2.Since one would not be concerned about the disappointment of very high plans, analyses were also run using recoded versions of plans and attainments, in which values higher than BA were recoded to be the same as BA= 16. This recode does not alter results very much, so those results are not reported.

3 Similar results are obtained on the full sample of 8969 individuals, not shown here.

4.What determines grades? Bowles and Gintis (1976) have suggested noncognitive components, which are not supported in some other studies (Bills, 1983; Rosenbaum & Kariya, 1989, 1991). Miller and Rosenbaum (1998) pursue this question in greater detail.

5.Logit analyses were also run to see the determinants of who got AA or higher vs. the high school graduates who got less than an AA. Using the same independent variables as the regression, the results indicate virtually the same conclusions as the above linear regression: grades, test scores, and homework all have significant influences, with grades having the largest influence. Grades have even larger influence than test scores in explaining disappointed plans. Similar findings occur in explaining who got BA or higher, although the grade influence is even greater. These tables are not reported because the results are virtually the same as those reported here.

6.Although just under one-third of college-attenders in the entire sample went to colleges rated for selectivity (2573 vs. 8302), the students in the rated colleges are highly similar to the entire sample.

7.Moreover, since nearly all students in non-open-door colleges plan on getting an AA or higher (94 percent), plans has little variation, so it is less likely to take away from the explanatory power of other variables in analyses of these colleges.

8.Students' misperceptions may arise from their limited knowledge about older cohorts. High school students can see the college enrollment of last year's seniors more easily than the college completion of much older students, and they can more easily identify with the students a year older than themselves who enter college, than with the 28-year-olds who never finished the degree. As a result, perceptions are likely to be distorted. Students easily see college enrollment, for which high school achievements are irrelevant, but they have difficulty seeing college completion, for which high school achievements are highly relevant.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Determinants of Future Relevance, No Penalty, and Effort (Standardized Coefficients)

	Future Relevance	No Penalty	Effort (Step 1)	Effort (Step 2)
Parental Support for School	.1702**	-.2786**	.2795**	.2128**
Rebellious Peers	-.0576*	.0943**	-.1369**	-.1143**
Pre-School Peers	.0949**	-.0217	.1157**	.0979**
Locus of Control	.1253**	-.1655**	.2060**	.1627**
Female	-.0411	-.0149	.1051**	.1094**
Low SES	-.0439*	.0828**	-.0554*	-.0366
Black	.0344	-.0202	.0006	-.0076
Hispanic	.0526*	-.0391	-.0370	-.0510*
Asian	.0660*	-.0030	-.0043	-.0149
Teacher Help	.2822**	.0510	.0893**	.0530*
School Help	.1310**	-.0441	.0564**	.0300
Future Relevance				.1550**
No Penalty Belief				-.1448**
R-Squared (adjusted)	.2446	.1710	.2947	.3393

n=2091

*=p<.05

**=p<.01

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Percentage of Seniors With College Plans Who Complete College Degrees Within Ten Years (The 1992 Degree Attainment of HSB 1982 Seniors)

Table 2a: Percentage of Seniors with College Plans (AA or higher) Who Complete an AA

Average High School Grades	As	Bs	Cs or Lower	Total
Percent attaining AA or higher	69.5	43.2	19.6	40.3
N	2007	4702	2086	8795

Table 2b: Percentage of Seniors with BA Plans Who Succeed in Completing a BA Degree

Average High School Grades	As	Bs	Cs or Lower	Total
Percent attaining BA or higher	70.7	46.6	20.5	49.5
N	1668	2944	916	5528

Table 2c: Percentage of Seniors with AA Plans Who Succeed in Completing an AA

Average High School Grades	As	Bs	Cs or Lower	Total
Percent attaining AA or higher	46.6	27.1	12.6	23.9
N	339	1758	1170	3267

Table 3: Regressions on Grades, Tests, Homework, Educational Plans and Attainment (standardized coefficients)

	1 Grades	2 Grades	3 Test	4 Test	5 HW	6 HW	7 EdPlan	8 EdPlan	9 EdPlan	10 EdYears	11 EdYears	12 EdYears
SES	.207*	.163*	.368*	.295*	.223*	.164*	.450*	.378*	.240*	.386*	.324*	.201*
Black	-.141*	-.150*	-.212*	-.202*	.055*	.060*	.096*	.094*	.159*	-.023	-.026*	.050*
Hispan.	-.110*	-.115*	.201*	.187*	.007	.002	-.013	-.008	.060*	-.059*	-.045*	.024*
Female	.178*	.176*	-.037*	-.041*	.179*	.174*	.035*	.031*	-.014	-.013	.007	-.040*
South		.020		-.055*		-.060*		-.014	.012		-.023*	-.008
West		.047*		-.007		-.017		.014	.013		-.058*	-.064*
NE		-.073*		.037		.002		-.015	-.017		.038*	.045*
Private		-.021		.059*		.092*		.061*	.028*		.075*	.056*
Voc.		-.164		-.221*		-.119*		-.206*	-.098*		-.176*	-.075*
General		-.173		-.178*		-.172*		-.211*	-.104*		-.184*	-.085*
Test									.288*			.236*
GPA									.126*			.221*
HW									.200*			.105*
R^2 (adj) %	12.2	16.1	27.2	33.5	7.8	12.1	19.6	25.3	41.2	16.5	22.1	36.3
n	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969	8969

*=p<.05

Table 4: Regressions on Educational Attainment: All Students, Whites and Blacks (standardized coefficients)

Regressions are for cases where EdYears is less than or equal to EdPlans

	All 1	All 2	All 3	Whites 4	Whites 5	Blacks 6	Blacks 7
	EdYears	EdYears	EdYears	EdYears	EdYears	EdYears	EdYears
SES	.154*	.211*	.127*	.213*	.113*	.225*	.190*
Black	-.072*	.050*	-.008				
Hispanic	-.035*	.032*	.011				
Female	.002	-.032*	-.025*	-.048*	-.031*	.055*	.024
South	-.006	.002	-.002	-.002	-.003	-.073	-.076*
West	-.060*	-.059*	-.064*	-.066*	-.069*	-.040	-.037
NE	.041*	.041*	.046*	.046*	.052*	.012	.011
Private	.031*	.045*	.031*	.047*	.033*	.019	.008
Vocational	-.083*	-.083*	-.044*	-.089*	-.047*	-.012	.000
General	-.089*	-.093*	-.052*	-.097*	-.052*	-.044	-.024
Test		.244*	.142*	.227*	.118*	.228*	.175*
Grades		.221*	.173*	.214*	.170*	.224*	.196*
HW		.119*	.050*	.114*	.040*	.071*	.043
Plans	.483*		.354*		.383*		.201*
R^2 (adj)%	40.3	38.3	45.4	38.1	46.0	27.2	30.0
n	8117	8117	8117	5014	5014	996	996

*=p<.05